

# Responsibility as a Business Strategy

## – the Business Case in Corporate Citizenship

Susanne Lang/Frank Solms Nebelung

- Corporate Citizenship is not a selfless act of philanthropy, but a matter of business practice: a “business case”. The essence of this concept – and the reason for its socio-political appeal – is a systematic linking of corporate interest and the common good.
- Corporate Citizenship requires a company to anchor its community-focused activities in its business strategy. No business will opt for sustainable commitment without recognizable benefit for its genuine (commercial) interests. Such benefit can take different forms: an improved public image, better motivated and qualified staff, team-spirit, less absenteeism, more of a competitive edge with the customers etc. What really matters is the fact that corporate commitment is driven by the companies’ very own interests. At the end of the day, this will always be a more reliable and sustainable reason for human action than idealistic beliefs – “ideas will always be embarrassed by interest”, as Karl Marx put it.
- A decisive step in the process of systematically linking community-oriented activities with business activities is the integration of the staff. “Corporate Volunteering” gives a face to a company’s civic engagement.
- Corporate Citizenship is an investment in social capital; from the viewpoint of players in the market economy, this reads as an investment in the non-economic conditions for commercial success.
- Corporate Citizenship activities are no substitute for state services at the national or local level; they act as a complement and can never be an alternative, because they will always and inevitably remain selective and limited to specifics. Above all, though, businesses do not wish to act as stop gaps, plugging the holes others left gaping, they prefer to act and structure things independently.
- Two primary lessons can be drawn from US experience which might also be useful for Germany: one is a continued development of the business case in Corporate Citizenship – businesses will only show long-term and large-scale community commitment, if it benefits their own interests. The other lesson concerns the impressive Corporate Citizenship programmes

showcasing US companies. These are not usually off the cuff projects but are the result of a continuous process of development, evaluation and learning.

- Lessons can also be learned from the British business network "Business in the Community". The most important lessons after twenty years of networking are: *1. Leadership is crucial – values and normative direction need to emanate from the top. 2 Money matters, but isn't everything. More important are time, energy, contacts, in short: "the muscle of business" 3. Corporate Citizenship processes should not be initiated by the public sector but grow out of private commitment.*
- Businesses active in the community will wish not only to assume obligations for the sake of society at large, they will also demand rights in just how to shape it. The same rules apply for corporate citizens as for individual citizen's volunteer work: those who lend a hand want to have a voice in how things go.
- 'Demand and Promote' more Corporate Citizenship has led to a debate on the very basics of the social contract in Germany. Therefore, broad-ranging discussion within society is required to look at the rights and obligations of a corporate citizen.
- Every successful cooperation project between business and civil society contributes to the establishment of a new culture of social trust and understanding. Equally, every successful project makes a practical contribution to the discourse of civil society on a new social contract, re-balancing and re-adjusting the relationship between state, business and society.

It's all about business: "Corporate Citizenship is not about how a company gives money away; it's about how it makes money". At first glance, this adage of US expert Bradley Googins (2002, p. 96) may be surprising. After all, we are accustomed to regard Corporate Citizenship or corporate community involvement<sup>1</sup> as a more or less costly good deed for the benefit of the com-

mon weal and do not see it as a tool for profit maximisation. **Properly understood, though, Corporate Citizenship is no selfless act of charity, but a method of strategic corporate management.** The essence of this concept – and the reason for its socio-political appeal – is a systematic linking of corporate interest and the common good.

Community involvement on the part of companies in Germany is still primarily done through donations and sponsoring. With a little optimism, though, tentative first steps towards a more sophisticated type of Corporate Citizenship can be discerned. Further development in this direction will hinge above all on finding customised access to Corporate Citizenship. German companies cannot simply imitate and copy the approaches taken in other countries. Every country needs to develop its own culture of Cor-

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1 There is an obvious trend to rather use the term Corporate (Social) Responsibility than Corporate Citizenship, defining the latter to cover only parts of the more comprehensive notion of C(S)R. In my view, this popular differentiation tends to underestimate the complexity of Corporate Citizenship, and I prefer the term Corporate Citizenship. It avoids passing the moral implications of the discourse on responsibility and is far more compatible with strategic and functional issues connected to the business case in Corporate Citizenship. In addition, this term relates more closely to civic engagement and its context of civil society, participation and democracy.

porate Citizenship, based on national characteristics, national business structure and culture, and last but not least on the relationship between state, business and society. Even thinking of an approach appropriate for the whole of Germany constitutes the kind of generalisation which is not without problems.

Swabian medium-sized enterprises, for example, have a very different tradition of involvement to Hamburg's upper classes with a more Anglo-Saxon-style approach. In short; there are regional variations in both the quality and quantity of Corporate Citizenship. It is also worth looking

at this from the point of view of different industries. H. Backhaus-Maul (2004, p. 28) identifies business sectors and regions which are Corporate Citizenship-intensive. Special attention should be devoted to the automotive industry, the consumer goods and pharmaceuticals sectors, as well as financial services, business consultants and trade in general. Areas in Germany where Corporate Citizenship is particularly strong are primarily the prosperous metropolitan areas of and around Cologne and Düsseldorf, the Rhine/Main-region around Frankfurt, Munich, Stuttgart and, to an extent, even the area linking Leipzig – Jena – Halle.

## **1. Corporate Citizenship: What is it about?**

Experts disagree and even among practitioners there is so far no unity of doctrine regarding Corporate Citizenship. In Germany in particular, there is precariously little knowledge about Corporate Citizenship. For years, academics, business people and politicians have been lamenting the lack of systematic empirical studies – nevertheless, there are no more than first attempts at changing this situation.<sup>2</sup>

For the time being therefore, Corporate Citizenship remains an enigmatic catch-all phrase for any community-oriented activity by business and covers traditional donations, the simple payment of taxes, or, going further, even entrepreneurial success which in and of itself can be said to constitute corporate responsibility, as

BDI<sup>3</sup> President Rogowski (2004) rather originally put it in a recent paper. To facilitate a systematic approach to Corporate Citizenship in the sense of a linked business and societal benefit, it makes sense to use a typology of community-oriented corporate practices; i.e. to differentiate between Corporate Giving and Corporate Volunteering.

### **Corporate Giving and Corporate Volunteering**

**Corporate Giving** is a collective term used to describe monetary activities, covering everything from a donation for purely altruistic reasons, via social sponsoring used as a marketing tool down to company-own foundations, such as the Robert Bosch-, Körber or Bertelsmann foundation, to name but a few of the better known ones. Apart from gifts of money for charitable purposes which is a kind of donation with a long tradition in Germany, there are also newer, more innovative types, such as companies adding an

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2 Interesting insight into the current status of Corporate Citizenship in Germany is provided by a small-scale qualitative survey of 10 companies (Heuberger/Oppen/Reimer 2004). Serious quantitative research has only just begun (Forsa 2005, Bertelsmann Stiftung 2005). Earlier studies, such as an oft-quoted survey conducted by the Institut für Mittelstandsforschung (Institute for research on SMEs; Maaß/Clemens 2002), are not convincing.

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3 BDI= Confederation of German Industry, an employers umbrella organisation, the equivalent of the UK's CBI.

appropriate amount to donations made by employees, the so-called matching grants, or giving in-kind donations such as computers or other work-related equipment.

**Corporate Volunteering** in turn means using staff resources for activities of common import. Corporate Volunteering can take the form of, for example, regular volunteer days or days of service, where employees go out into the community for a day of helping in projects such as building a playground, or renovating a school, or supporting a social services facility. Sometimes it refers to a longer-term cooperation between a company and a social service facility or other type of non-profit organisation with corporate employees supporting the partner organisation on a regular basis, either through working with schoolchildren, or caring for the needy, either by transferring organisational and/or technical skills, or by more unusual types of commitment such as providing sports opportunities for young people, as demonstrated by Nike employees in some of Berlin's problem neighbourhoods. They get a number of hours off every week to provide training.

**Both observers and protagonists of the US-American development, consider the increasing prevalence of Corporate Volunteering, which emerged in the 1980s, to signify the crucial breakthrough to Corporate Citizenship in the modern sense (Backhaus-Maul 2003; Googins 2002, p. 93). Compared to this, German companies can be said best case to be going through the process of catching up on this development of a contemporary Corporate Citizenship-culture, particularly because the systematic integration of employees into their company's community activities is still very much the exception rather than the rule. It is obviously true that "volunteerism" is one of the most basic traits of the US American culture of civic engagement**

(Googins 2002, p. 93), while there is nothing comparable in German tradition. Citizens – no less than companies – are more likely to call for government intervention in a situation crying out for collective action, instead of relying on the ability of civil society to resolve problems. Irrespective of all the differences in the cultures of civic engagement, a systematic integration of employees in concept and practice of Corporate Citizenship is required to prepare the ground for a full realisation of the economic, communicative and social potential of this approach.

#### **Benefits for a Committed Company: the Business Case in Corporate Citizenship**

Systematically linking community and corporate interests as characteristic for Corporate Citizenship implies that businesses – rightly – wish their community involvement to generate some economic benefit as well. Corporate Citizenship in its proper sense has nothing to do with an altruistic exercise of 'Love Thy Neighbour'; the underlying motivation is and should be a tangible business interest on the part of the company showing civic engagement, a properly defined business case. **Using potential corporate benefit as a guideline is yet another typical feature of Corporate Citizenship modern style, as opposed to the old style traditional kinds of corporate charity. Experts diagnose a shift in emphasis ...: Those concerned are less interested in altruistic public commitment; as corporate citizens, their objective is to establish a successful and strategic link between company goals and the common good.**

**This shift in emphasis towards a systematic link of the common good and self-interest is similar to a recent trend in the area of citizen volunteering. Here, too the motivations of those involved show a related process of structural change. Apart from motivations such as helping**

others, solving social problems, supporting the weak etc., people increasingly mention a need for self-realisation, self-development and the chance to realise individual ideas as the reason for their commitment, or even a wish to deepen individual abilities and capacities, having access to contacts and networks etc. All these motivations put the benefit the committed citizen can derive for him or herself as being equally important as the benefit for society at large. **Even civic engagement of the individual is increasingly moving towards a merger of self-interest and community interests.**

Corporate Citizenship can prove beneficial to the company in a variety of different ways:

### **Improve the Image**

Corporate Citizenship assists in achieving greater public awareness: "If you are concerned to be seen you must be seen to be concerned". In a survey of SMEs (2000), undertaken by the British polling institute MORI (2000) on behalf of Business in the Community, more than one quarter of those questioned mentioned **"PR-opportunity" as a decisive force for their commitment (more important than an interest in making a contribution to society (22%) and more important than employee retention (20%)).**

**The obvious prerequisite is for Corporate Citizenship activities to be in line with the other activities pursued by the company:** A company supporting local conservation projects with money and employee time, while at the same time running ecologically exploitative production facilities in developing countries, lacks credibility and will not find it easy to improve its image in either the medium or the long term. This is another argument explaining why Corporate Citizenship should be systematically integrated into the business as such, and not seen as an ornamental embellishment.

### **Having an Edge in Attracting and Retaining Customers**

Critical consumers do not only buy goods but values at the same time. Decisions to purchase are frequently made on the basis of a manufacturer's social and ecological performance. 70% of all European consumers take the socially responsible behaviour of a corporation into account when buying a product or service (CSR Europe/MORI 2000). One in five would even be willing to pay a higher price for products manufactured to a high standard of ecological and social responsibility (ibid.).

Whether these data apply equally to Germany cannot be stated with absolute certainty. Some years have passed since the aforementioned study and contradictory trends have developed meanwhile: on the one hand, a lasting debate on sustainability (including the effects of benchmarking devices, such as the Dow Jones Sustainability Index) and increased public awareness in related issues of corporate performance, on the other hand concern about keeping one's job and consequently being able to maintain a certain standard of living, leading to a prioritisation of employment to working conditions as well as a prioritisation of product prices to production standards. Food for thought is provided by a 2003 German nation-wide study of the St. Gallen Institute for Business Ethics<sup>4</sup> questioning 1000 people, the majority of whom agreed with the following statement: "A company's foremost task is to provide good products and services, jobs and to pay taxes. Companies should not be requested to do more" (54% yes, only 45% no) (Lunau/Wettstein 2004, p. 138). In addition, Germany in particular has few examples of consumers using their power in the market place to either reward companies for being socially or

4 St. Gallener Institut für Wirtschaftsethik.

ecologically responsible or punish wrongdoers through boycotts etc.

### **Employee Motivation and Qualification – Corporate Citizenship Creates and Unites Human Capital**

Even today, U.S. and UK business are aware that in the race for the highest qualified employees, these sought-after candidates frequently ask about Corporate Citizenship programmes and assess the desirability of a potential employer on the basis of, among others, the company's social and conservationist record. A Cherenson Group survey polling 800 Americans found that 78% of employees would be prepared to accept a lower income and work for a company with an excellent reputation rather than earn significantly more but work for a company of dubious repute (Cherenson Group, 2002).

The German labour market is presumably not sufficiently developed for Corporate Citizenship to play such a crucial role. But even in Germany, civic engagement can make a significant contribution to HR development: community-involved employees develop and deepen increased key capacities, such as being able to work in a team, being flexible, creative and self-responsible. As a rule, these people also show above-average motivation, commitment and flexibility in the workplace.

### **Corporate Citizenship Creates Social Capital**

A functioning market depends on non-market prerequisites: natural and social standards of living, stability in the social order, legal certainty etc. Even the legally binding character of a concluded contract constitutes a resource every player in the market needs conclusively. This cannot, however, be produced by means of the market, but derives from an altogether different source: the reliability of shared rules, standards

and values, a sense of communality and understanding between different members of society and of trust in state institutions. In short: **a functioning market economy needs social capital, and the success of every single player in the market to some extent depends on non-economic factors. I like to refer to Corporate Citizenship as „the art of giving back to the community“, thus implicitly appreciating that the community in return is contributing considerably to business success. In other words: Corporate Citizenship is an investment in social capital. From the angle of a market player this equals investing in the non-economic prerequisites of economic success.**

Of course, investment in social capital extends beyond the immediate business case, since *all* market players benefit from such investments. Just how vital these conditions are for economic success, is pointed out by the negative examples of market economies where these conditions are not (or no longer) complied with. This is how contemporary, volunteering-based Corporate Citizenship started in the USA, too, at a time of deep economic crisis in the 1980s where the American economy had lost its international competitiveness and only managed to survive thanks to its huge internal market. "This decline of whole sectors of the economy was partly seen as the result of the erosion of the socio-moral foundations of successful businesses in the US. In many locations, a poor education system has led to a lack of suitable personnel resources, while the impoverishment of whole neighbourhoods meant that local markets crucial for some industries collapsed" (Backhaus-Maul 2003, p. 88). In the UK, things are very similar: The establishment of "Business in the Community" in the early 1980s did not happen by accident at a time when local infrastructures were breaking down, and when inner city communities were breaking apart.

### Everyone a Winner: the Societal Benefits of Corporate Citizenship

Corporate Citizenship turns into a win-win-(win-win) opportunity by creating benefit for both the community at large and civil society organisations, either receiving corporate citizen's support or entering into a mid-term cooperation with a corporate partner.

The potential for social benefit rather obviously starts with the considerable financial resources companies hold and make available for the public benefit by means of Corporate Citizenship. It is increasingly important in the days of empty public coffers, to mobilise these resources so everyone can benefit.

The financial constraints of the public sector, though, also make a highly ambivalent environment in which to operate: Nothing has a more disheartening effect on the willingness of both individuals and companies to show civic engagement, than the suspicion of being a convenient stop-gap for a welfare state in crisis. **German approaches to Corporate Citizenship therefore suffer from the burdensome fact that the original calls for making CC an issue did not come from companies themselves or their various associations, but from the political arena (Backhaus-Maul 2004, p. 26). But Corporate Citizenship initiatives are no substitute for public services at state or community level, they complement them. This is due to their selective, case-based structure and to the fact they are dependent on both business cycles and the fashion for this or that issue; all of which combines to make them unpredictable. As far as committed companies are concerned, they must not simply be used to fill gaps left by another player, they need to have a chance to act and make their influence felt independently.**

The public debate on the rights and obligations of a corporate citizen should therefore be em-

ployed by government at all levels to credibly dispel some reservations, and civil society organisations would be well advised to address businesses not just as financial backers making up the deficit caused by shrinking state funds – a new kind of relationship needs to be developed here.

Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the contribution business can make to civil society constitutes a huge potential – in more than financial terms. **The transfer of knowledge from business to civil society is becoming steadily more important: increasingly sophisticated technology, more complex communication technologies, increasingly complex management demands, more subtle organisational issues, higher demands for qualifications for those actively engaged in the community, in short: a greater number of competences needed by an ever growing number of civil society organisations.** In their turn, companies can profit from these key skills which their committed associates are acquiring and improving and use them for HR management purposes. In the same way civil society organisations, which are becoming increasingly professional, can receive vital help from business consultants, the initiatives "Start Social" and "Seitenwechsel"<sup>5</sup> are two of the more well-known examples based on this approach.

Last not least: from a socio-political viewpoint, Corporate Citizenship is highly important because it serves as a counterweight to globalisation and its accompanying apparent uprooting of companies. While globalised companies seem increasingly to be independent of national borders, the reverse trend can also be observed with companies, even the global players, positioning themselves consciously within a local context. This phenomenon of glocalisation which at first

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5 Seitenwechsel = literally: changing sides.

glance seems to be contradictory offers a **link for developing a new social contract between business, state and society under globalisation conditions. In this sense, Corporate Citizenship might prove to be a viable tool for re-socialising those businesses escaping into globalisation.** DIHK<sup>6</sup>-President A. Braun (2004, p. 6) for ex-

ample, puts his trust in the civic-mindedness of companies. "Globalisation and the necessary structural reforms ... awaken fears among many citizens. Quite few companies see this as an opportunity and their commitment can help citizens to have a positive view of the future."

## 2. International Experience: Lessons for Germany?

Experts have been known to complain more than once that in matters of Corporate Citizenship Germany is lagging behind. This concerns the quantity and quality of corporate activities, as well as a support infrastructure such as a network for the exchange of experience between involved businesses and the communication of best practices etc. These two are linked: **CC-committed businesses usually look for like-minded partners for peer-to-peer learning processes, thereby contributing to the emergence of a critical mass ready to form viable networks. These networks in their turn hold great appeal, thus promoting other company's willingness to be involved. Both these factors, committed companies and viable networks, together form a civil society-minded (expert) public, motivating companies to become active corporate citizens, sensitising consumers and inspiring civil society organisations to attract partners from the world of business.**

If you look for ideas, you are well advised to look abroad.<sup>7</sup> A first glance should hit on the USA as the 'promised land' of Corporate Citizen-

ship. One of the most interesting network centres over there is the Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College ([www.bcccc.net](http://www.bcccc.net)). This membership-based research organization, working with companies to leverage both the societal and the business benefits of Corporate Citizenship, has an extremely sophisticated institutional design: it is an education (and further education) institution offering a wide range of qualification courses for executives and leadership personnel of companies which either are a good corporate citizen already or strive to become one soon; it is a research institute providing user-focused research on different aspects of Corporate Citizenship; it is also a network serving as a centre for over 350 member companies (behind which are over 2000 individual businesses worldwide). This institution at the interface of academia, business and public, which generates and disseminates knowledge, is already extending beyond the borders of the US and works with a global network of partner organisations all over the world; The Center's German partner is the CCCD – Centrum für Corporate Citizenship Deutschland ([www.cccddeutschland.org](http://www.cccddeutschland.org)).

The most important European organisation is 'Business in the Community (BITC)' ([www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk)).<sup>8</sup> Another positive example is the Danish

6 DIHK = German Chamber of Trade and Industry.

7 The following description moves within the self-drawn borders of reading economy which could, however, be sensibly extended by clicking on the relevant organisations' websites: all of these present a conclusive portrait of themselves, but also provide comprehensive further information material!

8 More detailed information on BitC to be found later on in this paper.

‘Copenhagen Centre for Corporate Citizenship’ ([www.copenhagencentre.org](http://www.copenhagencentre.org)) based on a kind of national contract between government and business; yet another model is provided by the equally exemplary development on the Netherlands (Kinds/Münz 2003), or by the supranational institutions, in particular the Global Compact sponsored by the Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan ([www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org)); yet another example is the European network ‘CSR Europe’ ([www.csreurope.org](http://www.csreurope.org)). These organisations are essential as forums for exchanging views or for knowledge transfer or just for publicity-effective communication. All the same, even these can only complement, but never replace a company’s own activities and experiences in the area of Corporate Citizenship.

### Looking at the US without Envy

The US is the undisputed champion of Corporate Citizenship. Any temptation to measure Germany against the US-American situation and attempt to translate the American experience to our own environment should be resisted all the same. Despite the apparent closeness, in the US we are dealing with another social and economic system, with a different culture of civic engagement and a different social contract than the European context.

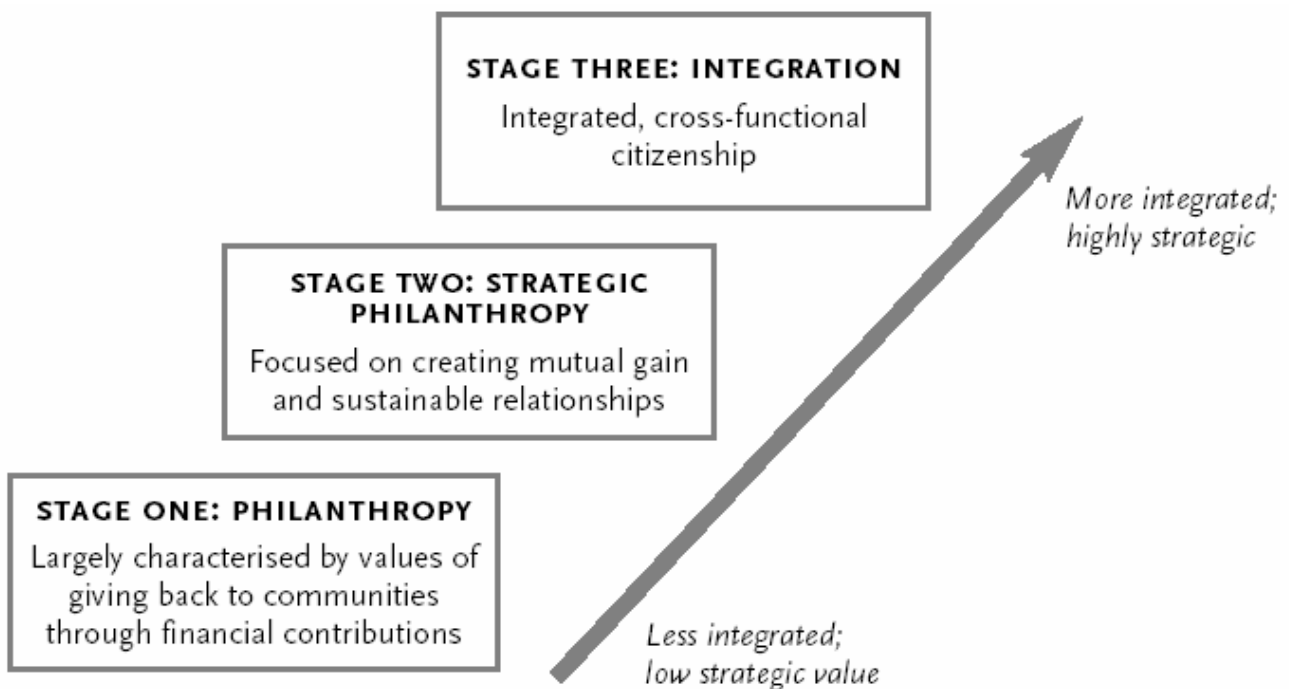
Civic engagement is one of the cornerstones of the US-American culture, forming an essential in the way American society regards itself: as far as possible, people settle their own affairs on the basis of self-organisation. The reverse side of the medal of the strong culture of citizen commitment is a state with minimum regulatory powers and with a minute amount of social security. Individual freedom is valued higher than collective solidarity, particularly when it comes to government-provided and publicly redistributed forms of solidarity and welfare. The strong em-

phasis on self-responsibility is assisted by compassion and a willingness to help, both growing out of the conviction that life’s risks, such as unemployment or poverty can hit anyone, but both making high demands on the good behaviour individuals in need will have to show: in the European welfare state the mere existence of a human being confers an entitlement to social civil rights; in the US, by contrast, one is expected to show oneself worthy of receiving charity. In addition, the high degree of self-responsibility people are expected to shoulder in issues of social responsibility is set off by the traditionally low expectations of the state (Backhaus-Maul 2003, p. 87). In short, we seem to be dealing with a model which is the exact opposite of the German social contract, with all the attendant pros and cons.

For a flourishing culture of Corporate Citizenship, though, the US American situation apparently offers more favourable conditions: a company’s willingness to be involved is both demanded and promoted, under conditions of fewer regulations and services, but imbued with a culture of taking (corporate) volunteering as a given. This means the public, consumers, employees, business partners and others all have high expectations of a company.

And yet, **despite all the differences in the culture of involvement, there are lessons to be drawn from the American experience which can benefit Germany as well. Two aspects in particular are of paradigmatic importance:**

**One refers to the consistent development of the business case in Corporate Citizenship – companies will only show large scale civic commitment for the long term, if a persuasive case can be made out for the benefit this involvement can add to the genuine interest of the company.** They will only put all their weight and their best efforts behind the idea of civic engagement, if a recognizable profit comes out of it.



Source: Googins 2002, p. 90.

**Even more crucial may be a second lesson: The impressive Corporate Citizenship programmes US companies can boast, do not come out of nowhere, but are frequently the result of a continuous process of development, evaluation and learning.** This gradualistic approach can be displayed on a progress scale leading from the stage of a rather unsystematic occasional philanthropy, via an interim stage of strategic philanthropy to an integrated Corporate Citizenship (Googins 2002, p. 89ff.).

This scale model describes some highlights among the best practices, such as the IBM programme *“Reinventing Education”*. IBM, undoubtedly one of the leading champions of integrated corporate citizenship, partners teachers and schools all over the world to develop new, technology-oriented subjects for lessons and learning. One of the most interesting features is the close linkage of Big Blue’s community involvement to Research & Development. Another excellent example is Cisco Systems’ *“Network Academy Pro-*

*gram”*, where at stage one of the occasional philanthropy level a conventional approach was chosen by donating network technology. Two mutually reinforcing insights promoted progress to stage two, the strategic philanthropy level: it was realised very soon that the organisations which had been given the computers needed training in order to use them. In the meantime, the sales department realised that the schools which had acquired computers were frequently unable to install and maintain these themselves. The company used this problem as a reason to develop skilling programmes for school students to enable them to maintain the equipment themselves. That had a triple benefit; first opening up interesting opportunities for the students to obtain additional qualifications; second, enabling schools to fully exploit their technological potential; third, to lower service costs for Cisco. Win-win-win ... At stage three, the integrated business strategy level, the Network Academy Programme became the cornerstone of a strategy which was to contribute to overcoming the digital

divide in society, and to open up education and career options for young people from low income families. This also supports two crucial business concerns: the establishment of both a future, well qualified staff reserve and an extension of the network of external service providers which Cisco can use for computer installation and maintenance purposes (Googins 2002, p. 91).

**In this scaled view which relies on the step-by-step establishment and extension of Corporate Citizenship programmes, it is immaterial if a company has not yet reached the highest stage of Corporate Citizenship. What matters instead is that this business gradually develops its own Corporate Citizenship culture, on the basis of its own business areas, strategies, objectives and values, and continually measures such activities against the business case – always supposing the company wishes to learn and develop, jointly with its employees, a customised programme and is willing to spend the necessary resources on the concept and the systematic evaluation of such a programme.**

#### **For Example Great Britain: Business in the Community as a European highlight**

Over 700 corporate members, including 80% of the British top 100, make Business in the Community (BITC) the largest as well as the longest-running European corporate network. Established in 1982, against a backdrop of a historical situation where the social capital of Britain was shrinking dramatically: unemployment was extremely high, there were riots in the cities, in short: social cohesion was crumbling noticeably, making some clear-sighted companies realise that the social resources for entrepreneurial success were getting scarce. They then started an organisation to create community-focused alliances between the private and the public sectors, as well as civil society organisations, in order to work

jointly on social problems. The development process and the methods of BITC as an organisation are paradigmatic examples for civic self-activation among members of a national economy.<sup>9</sup>

To a not inconsiderable extent, the success of BITC is due to the authority and charisma of its president: no less a personage than His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales, took the helm of this movement in 1987 and has been a committed and successful president ever since. He himself describes his specific approach with the words “seeing is believing”:

„I began to realize after a bit of time with Business in the Community that there’s only a limited amount you could achieve through making speeches ... or writing letters ... I began to realize that the only way is to pick them from behind their desks in London or wherever ... and take them to see the problems for instance in inner city areas and deprived communities in Great Britain” (The Prince of Wales 2002).

“Seeing is believing” is also the title of the programme run by Prince Charles himself. In the course of what has now been more than 10 years, about 2,700 senior management staff from British companies have been led to of the country’s social hot spots at the invitation of the heir to the throne, to meet volunteer organisations, NGOs, self-help groups and other potential partner organisations.

BITC identifies current problems and opens up a variety of different areas and project lines for member companies to start tackling them. One example concerns a programme to combat the

<sup>9</sup> The following lines are based on the BITC website, different newspaper articles, contributions from a seminar “Business in the Community – Companies in Society., The British Experience – Perspectives for Germany”, held on June 12, 2002 at the British Embassy, Berlin, and from a visit to BITC in London in November 2004.

national education emergency in British primary schools, where more and more children are not able to read or write – in 2002 there were 25,000 illiterates among eleven-year-olds. BITC members have committed themselves here, providing a total of 20,000 “reading volunteers” in the primary schools of problem neighbourhoods. Or take the problem of homelessness, which BITC was only able to suggest as an area suitable for corporate activity after conducting a survey on which social problems were to be tackled. A poll among businesses had ended with homelessness rated in 10<sup>th</sup> place, while the BITC survey ended with customers putting homelessness in second place. Companies paid attention to the customers’ views and are now involved in reintegrating homeless people into the labour market, supported by the BITC. An important new project is the Corporate Responsibility Index, intended to provide a transparent yardstick based on approved methods, to compare the social and ecological performance of companies, which also helps to decide whether Corporate Citizenship programmes are integrated into business practice, and how firmly anchored they are. The methodology of this voluntary benchmarking was developed jointly with member companies

and a range of stakeholders; the core item is a comprehensive questionnaire. The result comprises a systematic evaluation of responsible business practices of individual businesses and business sectors, identifying excellent practices and spreading them via a learning network of member companies. Last but not least there is a management tool to assess a company’s strong and weak points and to develop appropriate strategies.

Business in the Community offers a plethora of examples and learning processes which are also ideally suited for Germany to adopt. At an event in Berlin, BITC’s Executive Director, Julia Cleverdon, emphasised three points for the German audience which had been particularly important lessons in the British context:

- 1. Leadership is crucial: values and normative guidelines must come from the top.**
- 2. Money is an important but not an overriding factor. More important are time, talent, energy, contacts, in short: “the muscle of business”.**
- 3. Corporate Citizenship processes should not be initiated by the public sector but grow out of private commitment.**

### **3. The German Social Contract and the Role of Business in Society: a Difficult Framework for Corporate Citizenship**

In Germany’s institutional landscape, in other words: in the German social contract, companies are traditionally given little room for manoeuvre in the social arena.

In the Anglo-Saxon countries, particularly in the US, the state only claims a minimum of control, in Germany by contrast, there is a broad-based social consensus in favour of a strong welfare state with considerable powers to redistribute wealth, large regulatory powers and a compre-

hensive range of services. In terms of social involvement, the other sectors of society were and are clearly subordinate vis à vis the welfare state.

**The role, the rights and the responsibilities of civil society are clearly undergoing a sea change. Civil society has made its demands for co-determination something which could not be ignored ever since the start of the new social movements of the 1970s and 1980s and their “participatory revolution”.** Citizens who are now

emancipated democrats are becoming increasingly vocal in the way in which they interfere in the self-sufficient administrative processes of state and local authority. Attempts at modernisation, such as the so-called “citizens’ municipality” (Bürgerkommune) and other methods of civic participation reflect this development in the debate concerning local and general administrative reforms. In addition, the quality of the services provided by the state is limited – and the welfare state “customers” realise this and begin to take responsibility for their own life style and are becoming co-producers of customised social services. An impressive example of this kind is the growing self-help movement – the health sector alone numbers approximately 3 million citizens active in self-help groups. The establishment of the German Parliament’s Study Commission on ‘The Future of Civic Engagement’ and the ongoing debates on Civil Society as a Model<sup>10</sup> indicated that **the issue of a division and redistribution of responsibility between state and civil society has reached the wider public debate.**

**Anchoring businesses in society is a less obviously dynamic process.** In Germany businesses are put in the position of taxpayers and contributors whose interests are represented by the employers’ organisations. In addition, the state assigns to companies a certain joint political responsibility for Germany’s dual vocational training system as well as employment for disabled people. Apart from that, businesses can donate money and gifts to charities, on an individual basis and in return for tax breaks” (cf. Backhaus-Maul 2004, p. 25). In general though, the power to shape and determine the socio-political arena does not rest with individual companies but by their federations. (ibid).

This raises the question of the social position of a Corporate Citizen; after all, **a company is not just going to be willing to shoulder the duties of the common weal, it is also going to claim the right to shape this polity as well.**<sup>11</sup> **The same rules apply for corporate citizens as for individual citizens’ volunteer work: Those who lend a hand want to have a voice in how things go. Germany really needs a broad-based debate along these lines, discussing the rights and obligations of a corporate citizen – to what extent should a business influence education, and how do corporate decisions in this field effect the state-run school system? What is the role a company willing to be a committed corporate citizen should play in what despite all efforts at modernisation is still a largely corporatistic social sector?**

**The current change in the routines of our welfare state and corporatistic establishment creates opportunities which might help Corporate Citizenship in Germany to genuine breakthrough. Yet, these favourable conditions may be necessary prerequisites, but they are not sufficient. In the context of demanding and promoting a corporate responsibility, there will certainly need to be a debate concerning the social contract in Germany. After all, this is about readjusting the relationship between state, busi-**

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11 That gives a back-up for the polemics engaged in by presidents of employers’ federations and like-minded people against the framework for Corporate Citizenship in Germany which is indeed not without complications. This does not mean that taxes, charges and legal requirements such as redundancy protection or even the Industrial Constitution Law go too far – what we see here is an obvious attempt at exploiting the debate on Corporate Citizenship to serve different economic interests. But it does mean that there is an imbalance of rights and obligations imposed on corporate citizens: overlaying the German public debate is a righteously moralistic subtext, denouncing a lack of responsibility among businesses, while suspiciously ignoring the related issue of co-determination rights for businesses.

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10 Enquete-Kommission 2002; Bürsch 2004; various contributions in Meyer/Weil 2002.

**ness and society. Starting this debate is a necessary adjunct to the Corporate Citizenship of individual companies and is also part of a type of dual strategy and dual perspective which needs to focus on the pros and cons of Corporate Citizenship in terms of both business management and political culture.** This debate cannot be delegated by simply addressing part of the political or business arena, or by giving a ceremonial address at prestige gatherings such as “Freedom and Responsibility”;<sup>12</sup> cross-sector participation is needed, and at forums which are noticeably less spectacular, in other words: a broad public debate is needed.

This debate should give a voice to politics and business as well as civil society organisations. Quite a few of the latter still anxiously stroke

their prejudices and reservations vis à vis business and all too frequently address companies as enemies instead of potential partners. It is particularly important to clarify whether there can be mutually beneficial cooperation with businesses and if so, on what scale, without risking endangering, possibly even losing their special character as civil society organisations, etc.

**Every single successful cooperation project between partners from both business and civil society contributes to building a new culture of trust and understanding. Equally, every single successful project contributes in practical terms to the civil society debate on a readjustment of the relationship between state, business and society in a way which is socially acceptable and initiates a new social contract.**

#### **4. Corporate Citizenship as a Business Case: Seven Pillars of a Successful Business Strategy**

The heart of Corporate Citizenship is not to be found primarily in public debate, but rather in corporate practice, i.e. the development and implementation of a concrete Corporate Citizenship strategy. There is no magic formula – on the contrary: everything points to each company needing to find the most suitable commitment. It is therefore not easy to set up a general principle for successful Corporate Citizenship. The experience available both from Germany and abroad does allow certain conclusions to be drawn which might be considered as the ‘seven pillars of Corporate Citizenship’. A Corporate Citizenship programme does not have to rest on all seven of these pillars

to be stable, but if it rests on less than four of them, there is a genuine danger of collapse.

##### 1. The Business Case: Doing Business the Socially Responsible Way

The majority of German corporate citizens exhibit a more or less unsystematic approach to charity work. Even in the comparatively highly developed corporate citizenship-culture in the US, Brad Googins (2002, p. 92), complains that too many companies still mistake Corporate Citizenship for occasional philanthropy. In practice therefore, it always pays to emphasize that Corporate Citizenship is not a decorative appendage, and that activities geared to the common good need to be systematically embedded in the business strategy.

**No business will decide in favour of a long-term commitment and invest its best resources,**

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<sup>12</sup> The initiative is indisputably important because it creates positive publicity for the issue of Corporate Citizenship and contributes to a culture of recognition. However winning PR-valuable prizes and good individual practice, constitute a necessary but insufficient prerequisite for the development of Corporate Citizenship.

**unless this commitment is demonstrably in its own best interests. Business benefit can be multiform: a rise in public image, better motivated and qualified associates, team-spirit, fewer absences or a competitive advantage with the consumer – what matters is the fact that community involvement also benefits tangible business interests, which are normally a more reliable and lasting motivation for human action than idealistic beliefs. As Karl Marx put it: “an idea will always be embarrassed by interest”.**

2. Systematic Development and Learning Processes: From Occasional Philanthropy to an Integrated Business Strategy

Corporate Citizenship activities rarely start out with a big win. Excellent programmes are far more likely as a result of slowly searching for a way ahead. Such a result does not happen of its own accord though, or by accident. For a programme to move through the individual steps of the staged model, and mature from occasional philanthropy into an integral part of the business strategy, requires systematic development. **This in turn needs the most important movers and shakers in a business to embrace a genuine willingness to commitment, staying power, and experimentation, as well as being frustration-resistant and open for innovation and willing to learn.**

3. Finding the appropriate commitment: combining things which belong together

For sustainable involvement, a business needs the kind of commitment where content and design fit the company. There are different criteria to decide what constitutes such a match, e.g. current corporate identity, traditions and/or objectives for the future, a business area, core competencies and/or business strategy, associates’

qualification profile and/or HR development strategy and many more. It is important for these criteria to be comprehensible both within and outside the company and to enable the company to be identified with its Corporate Citizenship activities internally as well as externally.

4. Variety is the spice of life, but organized and not haphazard

Community involvement by its very nature tends to be colourful and diverse. The same is true for Corporate Citizenship. It is not the quantity but the quality of time and money donated which makes a good Corporate Citizen. A company with impressive glossy brochures listing global activities for all sorts of worthy causes, from combating AIDS, saving the rain forest to bridging the digital divide, while not following a clear-cut consistent path in its involvement, does a lot of good but does not yet have a good Corporate Citizenship programme. That can only come about through a **systematic bundling of individual activities and embedding them in an overall concept**, relating to the individual and distinctive profile of the company involved. In addition, a strategic Corporate Citizenship programme with conceptual and operative bundling of different activities can be significantly more effective without additional resources, thus increasing chances for efficiency gains.

5. Employee Engagement: Putting a Face on Corporate Citizen

**Employee integration is one of the most crucial steps in the process of systematically combining activities for the good of society at large with business interest. The development of attractive forms of Corporate Volunteering** in particular benefits a company internally, but it also affects the way (potential) customers and the general public perceive it. Internally, involv-

ing associates prepares the ground for their identifying with Corporate Citizenship activities as part of their corporate culture and identity. Externally, staff volunteering gives a face to the Corporate Citizenship activities of a business – Googins (2002, p. 93) speaks of „**the distinct advantage of putting a face on its citizenship**“.

#### 6. Focusing on Society's Needs: Close to Reality

Anyone wishing to exhibit Corporate Social Responsibility needs to get a grip on what a society or local community considers their common good or rather, their common problem. In other words: it is necessary to **identify and link up with an existing social need and/or problem which is brought to one's attention**. Not least, areas must be identified, where a difference can be made (with opportunities for a positive impact on the corporate environment as well), where traditional approaches and routines are being left behind and where a search for new avenues has begun.

The German education sector for example, fulfils these criteria; and there is also increasing corporate involvement: it did not need the PISA study to convince people of the urgent need for action in this field. Companies have at least a two-fold interest in functioning, high-performing education facilities (in highly-qualified future associates, as well as in good nursery schools and schools, which are decisive positive factors in competing to attract skilled employees to a location). Education facilities, too, are showing greater interest in cooperating with businesses. The same goes for a slowly moving social services and health sector as well as for other parts of society.

#### 7. A New Trend in Business

Corporate Citizenship stands for a new trend in business. It's about **sustainability** and **responsibility** – and certifying these by means of new

tools, such as the Dow Jones Sustainability Index or the “triple bottom line” which audits a company's social and environmental as well as its economic performance. It's about **informed consumer behaviour** and the targeted use of consumer power in the market to sanction the socially and environmentally responsible actions of businesses with the decision to buy or not to buy. It is also about new **networks** and **partnerships**, such as the **Global Compact** to serve as models for many new alliances between political institutions, civil society organisations and businesses. Combining these with new innovative methods, tools and initiatives, Corporate Citizenship stands for what Brad Googins (2002, p. 100), to let him have the last word, describes as “attempts across the globe to create a better fit between business goals and the health and sustainability of our families, workplaces and communities.

## On the Authors

**Dr. Susanne Lang**, Political Scientist (Diploma degree) and Doctor of Philosophy; born in 1962. She is the managing director of the CCCD – Centrum für Corporate Citizenship Deutschland ([www.cccdeutschland.org](http://www.cccdeutschland.org)). And she works as an independent political consultant on issues pertaining to the interface between politics and academia. Her focus is on civic involvement/civil society, Corporate Citizenship, social affairs and health policy. She is as co-founder of the working group “Civil Society and Activating State” of the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation and is active in the Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (a national network on civic engagement). She has written numerous works, among others: *Zivilgesellschaft und bürgerschaftliches Engagement in Russland*. Internationale Politikanalyse, Politikinformatio Osteuropa, Issue 116. Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Or: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/01930.pdf>.

**Frank Solms Nebelung**, Biologist (Diploma degree); born in 1964. He is a partner at BCC Business Communications Consulting GmbH, Frankfurt, and works as a consultant for companies, politicians, governmental and semi-governmental institutions. He is also active in civic engagement, including as a Member of the Board of "Deutschland liest vor" (Germany reads, an association); he also advises the Deutsche Gesellschaft für die Vereinten Nationen (German Society for the United Nations). From 1998 to 2000 he was the managing Director of the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival limited liability sponsoring company in Lübeck.

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## **Arbeitskreis „Bürgergesellschaft und Aktivierender Staat“ der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung**

Die Förderung der Bürgergesellschaft bleibt ein zentrales Thema der aktuellen Reformdebatte. Der Arbeitskreis „Bürgergesellschaft und Aktivierender Staat“ ist in diesem Diskurs seit langem ein Forum, das reformpolitisch relevante Themenstellungen aufgreift, analysiert und in der politischen Debatte Stellung bezieht. Damit soll ein Beitrag geleistet werden, ein Netzwerk für die politische Beratung institutioneller Reformpolitik aufzubauen und dessen Überlegungen der Politik vorzustellen. Der Arbeitskreis versteht sich insofern als kritischer Impulsgeber für die öffentliche Reformdebatte.

Anlass und Ausgangspunkt bildet das Interesse, die Stärkung des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements und des darin liegenden Demokratisierungspotentials einerseits und die Staatsmodernisierung in Kategorien des aktivierenden Staates andererseits zusammenzubringen. Das Augenmerk des Arbeitskreises gilt in erster Linie der Stärkung der Bürgergesellschaft und entsprechender Partizipationschancen: Diese Perspektive bestimmt die zu formulierenden Modernisierungsanforderungen an staatliche Instanzen und Akteure.

Die persönlich eingeladenen Mitglieder des Arbeitskreises reflektieren den interdisziplinären Arbeitsansatz: Die Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung hat Persönlichkeiten aus Politik, Verwaltung und Wissenschaft, Wirtschaft, Medien, Verbänden und anderen gesellschaftlichen Organisationen gewinnen können, ihre fachlichen und persönlichen Erfahrungen dem Arbeitskreis zur Verfügung zu stellen. Neben diesen ständigen Teilnehmern werden zu den jeweiligen Themen Einladungen an einen themenspezifisch kompetenten Adressatenkreis ausgesprochen.

In regelmäßigen Sitzungen diskutiert der Arbeitskreis Themen, die der praktischen Umsetzung bürgerschaftlichen Engagements sowie den Handlungsempfehlungen der Enquetekommission des 14. Deutschen Bundestages zur „Zukunft des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements“ förderlich sind. Sie werden zudem auf Fachkonferenzen, öffentlichen Veranstaltungen oder über Analysen und Gutachten aufgegriffen und vom Arbeitskreis kritisch begleitet. Zugleich dient dieser Gesprächszusammenhang dem Informations- und Erfahrungsaustausch und der Vernetzung seiner Mitglieder und ihrer Praxisfelder.

Der Arbeitskreis wird geleitet von Dr. Michael Bürsch, MdB (Vorsitzender der Enquetekommission des 14. Deutschen Bundestages) und koordiniert von Albrecht Koschützke, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Ausführliche Informationen, Kontaktpersonen, Konzeptskizzen, Progress Reports, Ergebnisse der Plenardebatten und Sitzungen der Arbeitsgruppen sind auf den Internetseiten des Arbeitskreises dokumentiert. Die Publikationen sind abzurufen unter [www.fes.de/buergergesellschaft](http://www.fes.de/buergergesellschaft) - „Analysen“ - „Analysen des Arbeitskreises“ oder unter [http://www.fes.de/library/ask\\_digbib.html](http://www.fes.de/library/ask_digbib.html).

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## **Publikationen des Arbeitskreises Bürgergesellschaft und Aktivierender Staat**

### **Analyse-Reihe „betrifft: Bürgergesellschaft“**

- 24/Advokatorische Think Tanks und die Politisierung des Marktplatzes der Ideen, Rudolf Speth
- 23/Zukunft gestalten – Strukturwandel in der Arbeiterwohlfahrt. Verbandsentwicklung und bürgerschaftliches Engagement, Wilhelm Schmidt
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- 14/ Geschäftsstrategie Verantwortung – Der Business Case im Corporate Citizenship, Susanne Lang und Frank Solms Nebelung, englische Version: Responsibility as a Business Strategy – the Business Case in Corporate Citizenship
- 13/ Wer braucht eigentlich die Bürgergesellschaft? Und wen braucht sie?, Wolfgang Hinte
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- 02/ Bürgerschaftliches Engagement gegen die Folgen der Arbeitslosigkeit – Chancen und Handlungsmöglichkeiten, Achim Trube
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**Going Gender für die BürgerInnengesellschaft: Gender Mainstreaming in zivilgesellschaftlichen Organisationen.** Marianne Weg, Bonn 2005, 92 Seiten

**Bürgerschaftliches Engagement: stabilisieren, stärken, steigern – Innovation und Investition in Infrastruktur und Infrastruktureinrichtungen.** Sabrina Born, Bonn 2005, 56 Seiten

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